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AUTHOR Sage, Grace Powless
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ABSTRACT

Those who come from non-American Indian cultures have dominated traditional models for healing and prevention. The assumption that current training strategies, program manuals, and levels of competence with regard to cross-cultural skills and knowledge are sufficient is arguable. If training programs for mental health, physical health, and substance abuse programs genuinely intend to integrate the sociocultural environment, it is imperative that they begin to define community, prevention, networking, collaboration, and healing as they relate to cultural understanding and awareness. Treatments must incorporate all elements of healing and prevention, and include persons from within the cultural context and community to offer appropriate interpretations and analyses. Ideally, the process will be ever-expanding and inclusive of the role of culture, context, community, and competence. It is incumbent on practitioners to seek and understand American Indian cultures and to support existing Native practices of healing and prevention. Prevention and intervention concepts are often embedded in traditional ceremonies that involve the individual in community-wide problem solving and healing. The integration of traditional healing practices with contemporary healers can create a blend of realistic and culturally congruent services. (TD)

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Worldview, Identity, and Prevention in American Indian Communities

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Grace Powless Sage

ED 452 006

Today, seven generations later, you turn to us as your own culture is failing. The land you took from us, tricked us out of, is becoming too poisoned to feed you. Your rivers and streams are dying. I wonder, why do you turn to us now? Is it because through it all we never stopped praying? Never stopped beating our drums, dancing and singing songs to the Creator? And that somehow, somehow, you couldn't silence us?

—Sioux Elder, Rosebud Reservation

Abstract

According to 1990 census figures, there is no doubt that the Indian Native population is growing rapidly, the population is a young one, and the population is geographically scattered. American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to experience high rates of unemployment and subsequent poverty. Most American Indian Natives continue to encounter substandard housing,

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insufficient health care, and other socioeconomic obstacles that make day-to-day living a constant struggle. In spite of these facts, American Indians and Alaska Natives have shown inspiring internal reserves and strategies for survival. Further, it is abundantly clear that many tribal groups have been successful in managing their resources and increasing the life-enhancing conditions for all members in their tribal communities.

The concepts of cultural context, identity, community, adaptability, resiliency, and perseverance have all been long associated with descriptions of American Indian communities but are often misinterpreted and ill-defined. This chapter presents a framework for understanding the culture context in terms of resiliency and the prevention process as it relates to health, mental health, and alcohol and other drug abuse issues in American Indian Native life. It is a design for a way of thinking and being that points to prevention and healing as they are relevant to the Indian Native communities.

Community, context, culture, healing, journey, path, ceremony, traditions: these words fall short of describing what has been the core of American Indian survival since the beginning. (In the United States, the terms Indian, American Indian, and Native American are considered interchangeable when referring to the aboriginal people of North America. The author will follow this convention.) Even so, these are the words and the language that can convey something of the wisdom and endurance of the Indian Natives. The real convincing, beyond words and language, comes in the day-to-day living and being face to face in a place that is far from that "other" world. It can be a challenge to many with another worldview to distinguish between mental health needs that are signals for intervention and Indian Native cultural distinctiveness that has provided strategies for prevention and survival.

When I first entered the field of psychology, I had no idea of the transformation that would take place for me from my entrance to the academy to my exit. I can only say that I would learn more about the capabilities, endurance, and sheer strength

of the American Indian Native spirit after the completion of my "training" than anything that I had learned or read during my years of formal education. My transformation confused the need for intervention and the cultural distinctiveness of Native people. The theory did not match the reality and it taught me to look at the deficit of the individual, rather than to understand the resiliency of the community.

I would be faced with circumstances and situations that were harmful, strenuous, and inconceivable, and yet here was a person sitting across from me asking for my assistance in helping them to heal. I was dumbfounded by the honest and forthright requests, and at the same time, fully aware of the insufficiency of my suggestions to people who had endured incalculable and unpredictable personal, family, tribal, and community changes. Still, here they were, in my office, asking for my help and assistance with their healing. I would ponder long and hard about their willingness to yield to my offerings with no mistrust in my adequacy. Finally, I was convinced that I was just another thread in a system that throws out life-ropes to many population groups. But the American Indian nations of people are practiced in learning ways of survival.

It was not until after I had been working for a while with many American Indian Natives that I realized that their strength, their wisdom, and their adaptability involved knowing how to survive all those life-rope systems. At the same time, an awareness grew in me that they had been using "prevention" methods long before it became the hot, new catch phrase of the profession and of Federal agencies.

Now, I chuckle at myself to think that I had thought there was something inadequate in my offerings. In fact, some of these American Indian people would say that I was more closely related to spiritual and medicine ways than I would certainly believe. Their acceptance of me as one of them was a humbling learning experience, for they accepted my perspectives as part of a larger system. Some of the more traditional American Indians would be respectful and aware of the need and practice of sharing all ways of healing for all sorts of ills. They would desire to meet all those in the business of healing and make

great efforts to share and embrace new ideas and concepts to ensure the continued well-being of their tribal community. In the American Indian Native community, they would wish to include all aspects of the healing circle and helpers who had specific knowledge or information in the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual ways of healing. This was truly a holistic model of being.

They would think it was silly to isolate one part of a person and only try to heal that part. This total and holistic view has been the practice of many American Indian tribal groups for thousands of years. Their survival has depended on the wisdom of their beliefs in the interrelatedness and connectedness of everything in the world. Further, American Indians have a clear understanding of the need for passing along all the information necessary for the survival of the community and the culture for future generations to preserve and for the prevention of the loss of their identity and well-being.

Prevention has been defined as "an active process of creating conditions and fostering personal attributes that promote the well-being of people" (Lofquist, 1992). Given this definition, one could allege that American Indian Natives have been working in the field of prevention for a long time.

Prevention and the American Indian Native Community

Since there is an awakening in the "other" world of the need, in fact the desire, for new paths to prevention and a new understanding of the connection and relatedness of physical health to mental health to alcohol and other drug misuse and abuse, it might benefit the reader to learn and understand how the field of prevention has developed in the American Indian community. It is a sense of well-being, healing, and a cultural context for which American Indian Natives have a keen awareness. Prevention takes place in their communities and within the cultural context and environment of that community. This is what serves as the connection to the "healthy" paths of the past, the

paths that bring them into the present and show how they must continue into the future. American Indian Natives share that prevention notion among their families, clans, tribal groups, communities, and with many others through their stories, ceremonies, and traditions. Their ways of survival, their ways of mental health and well-being, their understanding of themselves and their communities and their environment, was and is how they practice prevention and healing.

The Ways of Prevention

The Indian Health Service and its health, mental health, and alcohol and other drug treatment policies have been moving away from conventional psychological thought and toward the recognition and maintenance of health and mental health as it is defined and valued in the American Indian community (Nelson, 1988). The view of American Indian mental health must be observed in the cultural context of the American Indian Native communities that have been able to survive despite devastating conditions. What are the strengths, the learning, the ways of prevention, and the forces that lie within an interlocking network of family, clan, society, friends, and community that integrate the individual back into the tribal group?

The prevention and intervention concepts embedded in traditional ceremonies (such as the sweat lodge and other religious ceremonies) reinforce and strengthen the family and community. These healing practices and religious activities have taken place for untold centuries. They have been passed on to medicine men and women in an organized and ritualized way so that these people may serve, not only to treat but also to *prevent* illness of a psychological or physical nature (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). A focus of prevention through these traditional healing ceremonies not only contributes to the healing of the individual and reaffirms the norms of the entire participating Native community, but also continues the training and practice of the traditional healing perspective (Powers, 1982). New solutions, ideas, and creativity evolved within the

ceremonial life of the Native community (Walker, 1980). Prevention and intervention were interrelated to the religious, physical, and psychological environment and the medicine healers were the communicators and connectors to the individual and the community.

The impact and durability of the practice of prevention and intervention by American Indian Natives for thousands of years should engender respect for their enduring spirit. They are stubborn in holding onto what they feel is important and they discard what they do not feel they need—often with community consensus. There is no argument that Indian Native peoples have survived for thousands of years under all kinds of conditions and circumstances. Vine DeLoria (1969) stated it most succinctly in his book *Custer Died for Your Sins:* "They do not fly from fad to fad seeking novelty. That is what makes them Indian."

What is important to understand about the American Indian Native is their organization, community, networking, and sense of tribal purpose and solidarity. What is important to understand about the Indian Native is their connectedness and sense of place and land. The driving force behind prevention and intervention practices common in American Indian Native communities include holistic healing, community, and relatedness of all living things in the world. This strong sense of survival despite repeated governmental policies of extermination and genocide, and vast differences between and within tribal groups, makes the most persuasive argument for the efficacy of prevention as practiced by Indian Natives.

It is not difficult for most people to understand the practice of prevention when discussing strategies such as the sweat lodge ceremony or the religious ceremonies of the Indian Native as preventive in nature. What is more complex and involved is understanding how healing can be seen as a prevention strategy, particularly in situations related to alcohol and other drug abuse. The relationship between healing and prevention might make more sense if the healing ceremonies were to take place in the context of a culturally integrated community, and there was a sustained approach that targeted and involved the total community system for the identified purpose of healing and prevention.

After all, the healing ceremony would be comprehensive, target multiple systems, and use many healers and strategies—this has been defined as community-wide prevention (Benard, 1988).

The Ways of Healing

American Indian Native communities have long since mastered the art of community healing. The traditional healers understand and recognize the need for assistance when community-based healing is unavailable and when additional systems are needed. All resources, then, are seen as useful, complementary, and beneficial. Traditional healers do not separate the culture from the context and view the connection and dynamic interaction between them as necessary for the healing process. Primeaux (1977) writes that traditional medicine and healers embrace a wide array of energies that are interwoven into all aspects of being. The healers are frequently viewed as the connectors and preservers of the history, stories, and ceremonies necessary to maintain the cultural values and the context within which the cultural values flourish.

Individual healing ceremonies and prayers are seen as a means of accomplishing community solidarity and affiliation. These community connections also facilitate the creation of and possibilities for new solutions and new ways of dealing with old problems and conflicts. The healing and the healer support the cultural context through the ceremonies and stories and help to treat the individual and also to reaffirm the norms of the entire group. Prevention work is a result of the interaction between the healer and the client involving family, tribal, and community members who also benefit from the exchange between the individual, the group, and the sociocultural environment.

There are many systems of healing among American Indian Natives. Nearly all of them share the belief that large communal ceremonies serve as a way of promoting the well-being of the entire tribal group. This total and holistic view of healing has been the practical application of prevention methods for both naturally caused illnesses (e.g., disease, broken bones) and

illnesses of the mind and spirit. Indian Native prevention work is concerned primarily with the benefits to the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and cultural aspects of the tribal group. Thus, the role of the healer, as traditional practitioner, is one who reaffirms the cultural values, integrates all the pieces into the cultural context, and considers all those involved in the community.

The non-America Indian concepts of personal insight, individual awareness, and self-actualization are seen as agents of separation between the American Indian Native and their world. This separation between self and other can be problematic and dysfunctional to the Indian Native experience and worldview. Trying to balance the two systems of mental health and Native health, both conceptually or through application, can create multifaceted problems and can be programmatically very difficult to implement. The implementation may come in the form of realization or creation of a model for the practitioners who recognize the role they serve in the healing process with American Indian Natives. The awareness that one is part of an entire traditional healing process that has an established history, practice, credibility, and acceptance can be crucial and effective to the practitioner's survival, and more importantly, to the healing itself. Thus, with a new model, the practitioners become part of the circle of healing and foster a relationship with the rest of the healers in the circle in order to understand the roles and services of each. The outcome of this model would be that American Indians, who live in multiple and complex communities, would be able to find sustenance and healing regardless of the setting (Moses & Wilson, 1985). Moreover, the process and development of the model has yielded new disciples of healing and prevention, who then go on to become the new healers and traditional practitioners of the future.

Ceremony, Healing, and Prevention

Prevention is often discussed in terms of strategies and efforts. Keeping in mind the purpose of healing and the purpose of prevention, it might be useful to combine the two as they do inter-

act and relate in American Indian communities with respect to alcohol and other drugs.

The prevention strategy of information dissemination provides awareness and general knowledge regarding alcohol and other drug use, abuse, and addiction. Most of the time, this strategy is often one-way communication with infrequent contact. In the American Indian Native community, information dissemination involves many individuals (the community healers and practitioners) meeting together (in ceremony) for the purpose of involving and making aware (healing) as many community members as possible (prevention).

Education strategies of prevention regarding alcohol and other drugs often involve two-way communication and distinguish themselves from information dissemination by the fact that interaction occurs between the facilitators and participants. Typically, the education also impacts skill development and abilities. In the American Indian community, education regarding alcohol and other drugs (prevention) often appears as part of the individual and community participation (healing) in the ceremony. The skills and abilities would be the community's solutions, new ideas, and creativity to address problems regarding alcohol and other drugs. Again, the involvement of everyone and everything in a collaborative and cooperative manner for the benefit of the community is a prevention mechanism that supersedes the individual and affirms the cultural context (Trimble, 1982).

Alternative prevention strategies assume that it will be effective to find other constructive activities and ways to minimize the desire to resort to alcohol and other drugs. Programs often develop dances, games, and other optional activities for the sake of creating more viable pastimes. In American Indian Native communities, there has been a widespread awareness and an increased desire to resume cultural practices. This has inspired traditional community, practitioners, and kinship networks to become more supportive and more accomplished at providing cultural services. As these systems have developed, more traditional roles, alternative practices, and ceremonies become more regularly scheduled and systematically available. The result is

that the prevention strategy of healthy and constructive alternative activities is established in the Indian Native community through revitalizing old practices and making the community aware of them.

Problem identification and referral is used as a prevention strategy for individuals who have indulged in alcohol and other drug behaviors, but are not yet abusing or addicted. Common thinking is that the person's behavior can be reversed through education and other activities. In the American Indian Native community, a family will often identify someone who has problems with alcohol and other drugs and whom they feel has the potential to benefit from a ceremony (healing). The same family will also involve others who might be involved with alcohol and other drugs, but are not yet experiencing problems. The public might also be made aware of the time and place of the ceremony for the purpose of involving the community. The result is that identification and referral of an individual, who can often be lost in a system, becomes the focus of the communal ceremony, which involves both healing and prevention.

Community-based process is a prevention strategy that strengthens the community services and agencies to provide better prevention and treatment for alcohol and other drug problems. The process supports the organization and planning for improved collaboration, coalition building, and networking within and between communities. Environmental prevention strategies often relate to legal standards and codes, as well as service-oriented initiatives developed in complement with societal changes and practices. In Indian Native communities, the healing and prevention efforts by a multifaceted and multitalented group of people established this community-based process as the foundation for their understanding and worldview. Historically, Natives have instituted intertribal linkages for the sake of survival and development. Soon these linkages became reinforced through the commitment and caring of the healers and traditional practitioners. As the bonds of relatedness grew stronger, stories and ceremonies were revived to champion the natural process that was nearly eradicated by the Federal Government and its systematic policies of termination

and extermination. Many of the activities that take place in Indian Native communities today result in the improvement and maintenance of many of these communal practices.

Inouye (1993) has proposed four strategies to be included as prevention and intervention approaches when serving the mental health needs of American Indian adolescents. These methods can be broadened to include the Native Indian context and community. The strategies include: (1) strengthening and building on family ties that are a source of spiritual and cultural pride; (2) identifying sources of depression that stress the community and enhance traditional ceremony; (3) augmenting American Indian Native community practices that enhance worldview and identity through the use of ceremony and tradition; and (4) involving the entire community in formulating healthy prevention projects to ensure survivability and sustainability.

While American Indian Native communities still struggle with alcohol and other drug problems, flexibility and adaptability at all levels have been the standards and practice for centuries. Often the versatility in the individual and the community came about in response to dwindling resources, unexpected crises, and changes as implemented by governmental agencies. The hallmark of the Indian Native spirit has been their community values and spirit, permanence, patience, and sense of humor during periods of great dissonance and necessity. The environmental practices of ceremony, prevention, and healing embedded in the entire fabric of Indian Native life have withstood the test of durability.

Conclusion

The recent attention to cultural competence and prevention as it relates to substance abuse is refreshing and exhilarating. What is unsettled in my mind is the nature and direction of cultural competence and prevention efforts. Basically, the field of prevention can be considered to be in a vacuum in the academy or the bureau or the agency charged with prevention and intervention responsibilities. The real accomplishment of cultural

competence and prevention will be in day-to-day real life circumstances. When an American Indian Native can seek ceremony, healing, and prevention in response to a distress they are experiencing and the help-givers, healers, and significant others converge to blend elements of the existing treatment approaches to the benefit of the distressed Indian Native, then the concepts of prevention and cultural competence become real.

The result of that convergence of tradition with the contemporary is that Indian Natives return to their previous and customary sociocultural role within their own cultural context. The circle is complete and revitalized due to the fact that healing and prevention have again served the role that Indian Native culture has believed in and practiced for a long time.

In this chapter, cultural competence has been defined as recognition of the relationship between the American Indian Native groups and the concepts of healing and prevention. It has been argued that the Indian Native values of community, ceremony, healing, and prevention do not always follow contemporary health or mental health practices. In fact, the Native conceptual notions of healing and prevention are often at odds with a non-Indian approach to services and service delivery.

What is important to remember is that once culturally valued services and programs are embedded in the cultural context, the role of holistic healing, ceremony, and prevention can only be viewed in that context. Then services and practitioners adjust to one another in order to form an entire program, which is supported and meaningful in the cultural context. Taken out of context, as is often the case, the value and practice of healing and prevention in the community with cultural competence can be seen as unnecessary and impractical.

Those who come from different cultures and understandings have dominated the traditional models for healing and prevention. The pressing need for cultural competence at all levels of training, service, and service delivery is evident. The assumption that current training strategies, program manuals and text, and levels of competence with regard to cross-cultural skills and knowledge are sufficient is arguable. Often, the meager amount

of coverage and information that clinicians and educators receive is stereotyped, outdated, and inaccurate.

If training programs for mental health, physical health, and substance abuse programs are genuinely intent about integrating the sociocultural environment, then it is imperative that they begin to define community, prevention, networking, collaboration, and healing as it relates to cultural understanding and awareness. They must refine the treatment process to incorporate all the elements of healing and prevention, and include others in the cultural context and community to offer appropriate interpretations and analyses. Ideally, the process will be ever-expanding and inclusive of the role of culture, context, community, and competence. The outcome of this kind of process can lead to the development of new sociocultural theories, understandings, and models.

As prevention and healing have advanced in the Indian Native communities, it is becoming clear that the collaborative efforts of many in the circle are helping to reduce the problem behaviors of alcohol and other drug problems. All people involved in prevention efforts should support and nurture the developments that work and encourage further exploration.

For many people of all cultures, when an individual has a problem, that individual needs to be responsible for the solution. Likewise, when problems like alcohol and other drug abuse are grounded in the community, then let us listen to the community for resolution. It is incumbent on the practitioners to seek to discover and understand the culture of the American Indian Native. Moreover, it is imperative that we support the existing Native practices and nature of healing and prevention. It is important to understand our role and discover the need for fitting into present models. The integration of traditional healing practices with contemporary healers can create a blend of realistic and culturally congruent services.

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